

Disraeli who might dispute with him the primacy in genius:—

Modern English letters have given us no offspring equal to *Gontarini Fleming*. Cast in our Teutonic mould, it is nevertheless one of the most original works ever written : profound, poignant, pathetic; its subject the most interesting, if not the noblest, imaginable — the development of a poet; truly psychological; passion and mockery; Gothic richness, the fantasy of the Saracens, and yet over all a classic, even a death-like, repose.¹

One of the most discerning critics ² of Disraeli's novels has noted the excellence of his style in early life as compared with what we find after the habits of Parliamentary oratory had grown upon him; and though we may not be able to adopt his own too complacent judgment that *Oontarini* is 'the perfection of English prose,' his style perhaps is here at its best. It has a rhythm and swing that carry us along, and is full of sparkle and vitality; and though it is deficient in some of the finer graces of consummate prose, in the unerring instinct of the scholar for the most appropriate word, in tenderness, in delicacy, in all that prose may legitimately borrow from poetry, there is no lack of any rhetorical excellence. At times the fervour of the rhetoric carries us to real heights of imaginative eloquence, and it is not often that the eloquence degenerates into bombast or that the glitter of the style becomes merely meretricious; while we find comparatively little of the affected prettiness or careless verbiage that are too frequent in the later novels. On the other hand, there is a curious absence in *Oontarini* of the special qualities which give to the novels their peculiar flavour. Disraeli is here so full of his high poetic theme that we seldom see the familiar ironic smile playing over his features or catch that note of

¹ I am indebted for this passage to Dr. I¹. G. Brewster's -work *Disraeli in Outline*, but have not succeeded in tracing the original reference.

² Sir Leslie Stephen, : *Hours in a Library*, II., p. 139. VOL. i — o